

A REGENCY HOLIDAY TREAT RECOMMENDATION FROM

Sabrina Jeffries

Sugar Plums

Ingredients

- ¼ teaspoon aniseeds
- ¼ teaspoon fennel seeds
- ¼ teaspoon caraway seeds
- ¼ teaspoon green cardamom seeds
- 6 ½ ounces slivered almonds, toasted
- 4 ¼ ounces pitted prunes (plums)
- 4¼ ounces dried apricots
- 4¼ ounces dried figs
- Pinch of salt
- ¼ cup powdered sugar
- ¼ cup runny honey
- 1 cup golden caster sugar

Heat a small, non-stick pan. Add to pan the aniseeds, fennel seeds, caraway seeds and cardamon seeds and cook, stirring constantly until lightly toasted and aromatic (be careful they do not burn). Take off the heat, turn into a mortar and pound lightly to bruise, then set aside. In the meantime, combine the almonds, plums, apricots and figs in a food processor. Pulse briefly about 20 times or until all the ingredients are finely chopped (do not over mix, they should not be a solid mass). Turn this mixture into a bowl, add the dry spice seed mixture and salt, then mix in powdered sugar before pouring over the honey. Mix well with your fingers to combine then scoop the mixture into a 1½ teaspoon portion and form into a ball; roll in the golden caster sugar to coat. Set aside on a wire rack as you roll and coat the remainder of the mixture. Leave the sugar plums out for a couple of days to dry then transfer to an air-tight container where they can be stored for up to a month. In the Georgian period, these were also the basis for "kissing comfits," in which the sugar plums were flavored with aromatics such as ambergris, musk, peppermint, and citrus oils and used for sweetening the breath.

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Honey Merry Christmas Cookies

Ingredients

1/3 cup shortening

1 egg

1 teaspoon lemon extract

1 teaspoon soda

1/3 cup sugar

2/3 cup honey

2 3/4 cups flour

1 teaspoon salt

Mix ingredients in a bowl. Chill dough two to three hours. Roll out dough on surface and cut into circles or other shapes as desired. Sprinkle with colored sugar. Bake at 375 degrees F. for eight to ten minutes. Cool and serve.

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Negus

Negus is another name for mulled wine, which traditionally was prepared by adding some cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, fruit peel or other seasonings to a mug of wine and then heating it by stirring with a hot poker from the fire.

Mulled Wine

Ingredients

2 ½ cups sugar

1 ¼ cups water

4 dozen whole cloves

Peel of 3 lemons and 2 oranges

6 sticks cinnamon

3 crushed nutmegs

4 cups hot lemon or lime juice

4 bottles red wine

Slices of lemon and pineapple (optional)

Place first six ingredients in a pan and boil for five minutes to make a syrup. Strain the syrup and add the lemon or lime juice. Heat well and add the red wine. Serve very hot with slices of lemon and pineapple. These proportions may be varied to taste. Sometimes Madeira, port or sherry is used in lieu of wine. Serves a crowd.

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Plum Pottage or Christmas Pottage

Take a leg of beef, boil it till tender in a sufficient quantity of water, add two quarts of red wine and two quarts of old strong beer; put to these some cloves, mace and nutmeg, enough to season it; and boil some apples, pared and freed of the cores, in it till tender and break them; and to every quart of liquor, put half a pound of currants, picked clean and rubbed with a coarse cloth, without washing. Then add a pound of raisins of the sun, to a gallon of liquor and half a pound of prunes. Take out the beef, and the broth, or pottage, will be fit for use.

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King George Christmas Pudding

(The 1714 recipe for King George's first Christmas pudding.)

Ingredients

- 1 pound of eggs
- 1 1/2 pounds shredded suet
- 1 pound dried plums
- 1 pound raisins
- 1 pound mixed peel
- 1 pound currants
- 1 pound sultanas
- 1 pound flour
- 1 pound sugar
- 1 pound breadcrumbs
- 1 teaspoon mixed spice
- 1/2 grated nutmeg
- 1/2 pint milk
- 1/2 teaspoon of salt
- Juice of lemon
- Large glass of brandy

Mix together all ingredients in large pot and let stand for twelve hours. Boil for eight hours and boil again on Christmas Day for two more hours. Yields nine pounds of pudding.

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Fine Ginger Cakes

Take four pounds of flour and put on your dresser, then take a copper saucepan, and break six eggs and mix them well with a spoon; put one pint of cream in them, and beat them well; put the saucepan over the fire, and stir until it is just warm; put two pounds of butter into the cream and eggs; and one pound of powdered sugar, and stir it over a very slow fire, just to melt all the butter; put in four ounces of pounded ginger, and when all the butter is melted, pour it all into the middle of the flour, mix it as well as you can, and when you have made it a fine paste, roll it out with flour under it, on your dresser, cut them to the size of the top of a breakfast cup, and a quarter of an inch thick: put three papers under them, before you put them in the oven, which must be very hot. These are very good for the stomach in cold weather.

The Modern Translation

Ingredients

6 eggs

1 pint heavy whipping cream

8 sticks butter

15 cups flour

1 1/2 cups ground ginger

Parchment paper

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In large bowl, beat eggs and whipping cream. Add mixture to large saucepan and turn burner to medium, stir continuously just until mixture is warm. Add butter and sugar to saucepan; heat until butter melts, stir frequently and add ginger. Dump flour on clean, heat-resistant surface. Make well in center of flour and pour in liquid mixture; mix to create a fine paste. On floured work area, roll out dough to a quarter of an inch thick. Use a cookie cutter or cup to cut out ginger cakes. Place cakes on parchment-lined baking sheet and bake until no longer doughy—about 10 to 15 minutes. Makes a good many cakes. Feel free to halve or quarter the recipe if desired.

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Ratafia

Take four pounds of flour and put on your dresser, then take a copper saucepan, and break six eggs and mix them well with a spoon; put one pint of cream in them, and beat them well; put the saucepan over the fire, and stir until it is just warm; put two pounds of butter into the cream and eggs; and one pound of powdered sugar, and stir it over a very slow fire, just to melt all the butter; put in four ounces of pounded ginger, and when all the butter is melted, pour it all into the middle of the flour, mix it as well as you can, and when you have made it a fine paste, roll it out with flour under it, on your dresser, cut them to the size of the top of a breakfast cup, and a quarter of an inch thick: put three papers under them, before you put them in the oven, which must be very hot. These are very good for the stomach in cold weather.

Ratafia

(From Robert's Guide for Butlers and Other Household Staff, published in 1828.)

Ingredients

1 quart brandy

½ pint cherry juice

½ pint currant juice

½ pint raspberry juice

Cloves, a few

White pepper, a few grains

Green Coriander, two grains

Cinnamon, a stick or two

Cherries

Apricots

Into one quart of brandy pour half a pint of cherry juice, as much currant juice, as much of raspberry juice, add a few cloves, and some white pepper in grains, two grains of green coriander, and a stick or two of cinnamon, then pound the stones of cherries, and put them in wood and all. Add about twenty-five or thirty kernels of apricots. Stop your demijohn close and let it infuse for one month in the shade, shaking it five or six times in that time at the end of which strain it through a flannel bag, then through a filtering paper, and then bottle it and cork close for use; you can make any quantity you choose, only by adding or increasing more brandy or other ingredients.